

A publication of

**B** *BLESSING*  
Health System

# Personal **BLESSING**

OUR PATIENTS. THEIR STORIES.

SPRING/SUMMER 2025

Celebrating through the  
stories of our patients



**150**  
YEARS  
BLESSING HOSPITAL  
CELEBRATING CARE, COMPASSION & COMMUNITY

HOW OUR HEART CARE IS  
CHANGING LIVES

PAGES 3-8

YES. MEN CAN GET  
BREAST CANCER.

PAGES 10-11

MEET OUR  
NEW DOCTORS

PAGES 16-17



Published by the Marketing, Communications & Community Relations staff of Blessing Health, *Personal Blessing* provides general information on health-related topics. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, which should always be obtained from your physician.

## The Blessing Health Mission Statement:

To improve the health of our communities

## The Blessing Health Vision Statement:

Blessing Health will be exceptional

- in providing a safe, high-quality healthcare experience;
- in being the best place for providers to practice;
- in being a place where employees want to work and students want to learn; and
- in partnering with our communities.

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# HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!

This year, your hospital—**Blessing Hospital**—celebrates its 150th anniversary.

Blessing has an exceptional history. Built with funds donated by the public and on land donated by a prominent Quincy couple, the hospital opened with 19 rooms on May 10, 1875. Today, we are proud to be a nationally recognized regional health care provider, delivering more than 575,000 patient encounters annually and operating with more than 200 staffed beds. We plan to be here for another 150 years to meet the healthcare needs and improve the health of the communities we serve.

We invite you to visit our webpage, [blessinghealth.org/150years](http://blessinghealth.org/150years), to learn more about Blessing Hospital's history and other anniversary-related information.

## Two more reasons we have to celebrate this year

Our **cardiac electrophysiology program** has earned national accreditation from the American College of Cardiology. On the day we received the accreditation, our program was one of fewer than 50 in the entire country and the only one in Illinois to have earned this achievement. Please read more about this accomplishment on the following pages of this magazine.

We have kicked off a project that will bring arguably the best electronic health record (EHR) in the country—and maybe the world—to Blessing Health System. It is made by the Wisconsin-based company, Epic.

The **Epic EHR** will provide you with a comprehensive health record that can be accessed by your provider in real time, resulting in better continuity and coordination of care throughout the health system. You will also be able to access your health records at any time, including records from other providers anywhere in the country who use the Epic system. We look forward to providing you with easier access to your health information and creating a more collaborative and transparent health care experience for every patient we see.

For your providers and the Blessing teams that support the care they provide, the features of the Epic EHR will bring a new level of operational efficiency.

The new system is expected to be up and running in March 2026. ■



# Blessing Health

## THE HEART OF YOUR CARE

### CARDIOTHORACIC SURGERY



JOHN ARNOLD, MD



ANDREA UHLMAYER,  
DNP, AGACNP-BC, FNP-C



JOHN HAMMOCK,  
MD, FACC, FHRS



OLEG YUREVICH, MD



KRISTEN BUERSTATTE,  
PA-C



JUSTIN HARTUPEE,  
MD, PhD

### NON-INVASIVE CARDIOLOGY



PERVEZ ALVI,  
MD, FACC



FAROOQ JUNAID, DO

### INVASIVE CARDIOLOGY



IRVING SCHWARTZ,  
MD, FACC

### STRUCTURAL HEART



AMY BATES,  
APRN-AGACNP



DIANA WEATHERFORD,  
RN

### GENERAL CARDIOLOGY



ALYSSA CROWE,  
APRN, AGACNP-BC



JASON LITTLE,  
APRN-AGACNP



LYNDELL LOMAX,  
APRN-AGACNP



STACY LOWARY,  
APRN-FNP



ANNE SMITH, FNP

### INTERVENTIONAL CARDIOLOGY



JEFFREY COOK,  
MD, FACC, FSCAI



STEVEN KRAUSE,  
DO, MHA, FACOI



KELSEY GRAY,  
APRN-AGACNP

Call **217.214.3424**  
to schedule an appointment.

**B** **BLESSING**  
Health System

[blessinghealth.org/heart](https://blessinghealth.org/heart)



# Man finds out that when it comes to heart care, the movie line is true—there is no place like home

**Jerry Kaszynski knows how to keep the beat.** For the past three years, the 75-year-old retired chemist from Hannibal has played bass guitar in the Southern Rail country music band—to the delight of line dancers from Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri to Riverside, Iowa, and many towns in the Tri-State area.

“I’ve been playing music since I was 12 or 13 years old,” Jerry said. “Besides my love of playing music and performing, I enjoy watching the audience. It is so much fun seeing them dancing and enjoying themselves.”

But when it comes to keeping the beat, Jerry’s heart was a different story. During a visit to a doctor due to pain in his feet, Jerry and his wife of 50 years, Mary, received some shocking news.

“My heart rate was 33,” Jerry said after his vital signs were checked during the appointment. “That kind of raised a flag.”

For adults, a typical resting heart rate is between 60 and 100 beats per minute. A slow heart rate (known as bradycardia) can be a serious problem because the heart can’t pump enough oxygen-rich blood to the body.

## Jerry’s attention turned from his feet to his heart

Jerry became a patient of the **Blessing Health Hannibal Cardiology department** where he was diagnosed with two conditions—a heart rhythm problem and a moderate-to-severe aortic stenosis. That is a failing heart valve. Aortic valve stenosis causes the valve to narrow and

not open fully. This reduces or blocks blood flow from the heart to the rest of the body, causing the heart to work harder, leading to an increased risk for heart attack and heart failure.

“I was feeling tired, but these kinds of things can sneak up on you,” Jerry said of his lack of symptoms. “You don’t realize you are going downhill. It’s not like a cliff, and down you go.”

In addition to his music, Jerry loves sports.

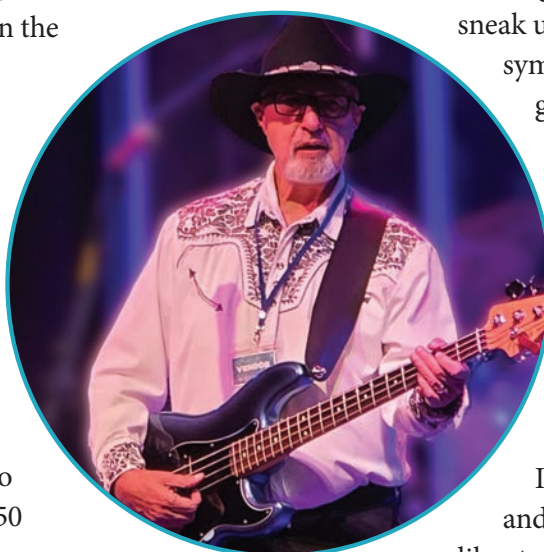
“I was still active, playing basketball, tennis, pickleball, just everything. We were shocked.”

“I was worried,” Mary added. “He’s always been healthy and active. I worried about it bringing him down and not being able to do the things he likes to do.”

Jerry’s Blessing Health Hannibal cardiology team gave him options of seeing specialists at the Blessing Heart & Vascular Center in Quincy or going to Springfield, Illinois or St. Louis or Columbia, Missouri.

As a retired chemist, Jerry is a “science guy” who loves to ask questions and do research.

He looked into his options and chose the **Blessing Heart & Vascular Center** where he became a patient of **Dr. Oleg Yurevich**, electrophysiologist,



Mary and Jerry Kaszynski

for his heart rhythm problems and of **Drs. Jeff Cook, John Arnold** and **Amy Bates**, nurse practitioner, for his failing aortic heart valve.

“I told Mary, I could not believe the technology and the expertise is right here,” Jerry said. “I did not have to go a thousand miles away to have these procedures done. It’s right here, 30 miles from our home. I cannot imagine going anywhere else in the country and getting better care.”

On November 3, 2023, in Blessing’s nationally accredited electrophysiology (EP) lab, Dr. Yurevich implanted a pacemaker to bring Jerry’s heart rate to normal and regulate it.

“That went extremely well, and it validated that we made the right choice in choosing the Blessing Heart & Vascular Center,” Jerry said.

### Now about that heart valve

With his pacemaker in place, the Blessing Heart & Vascular Center team continued to track Jerry’s failing aortic heart valve. After 11 months, the valve reached a point where it needed to be replaced.

There are two options – open heart surgery or a minimally invasive procedure called Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR). Blessing does both procedures.

For patients who qualify, TAVR does not require surgical opening of the chest. Instead, the new heart valve is placed using a thin tube called a catheter using X-ray guidance.

“The valve device deploys without having to stop the heart,” said Dr. Arnold, cardiothoracic surgeon, who participates in TAVR procedures.

Most TAVR patients can be released from the hospital in one day, compared to three to five days for those who undergo surgical valve replacement—and with less pain and blood loss and a quicker recovery time.

“Jerry was young and healthy enough that we could have pursued conventional surgery,” said Dr. Cook. “After hearing the pros and cons of both, he chose TAVR. We expect him to have a good long-term outcome.”

Jerry’s TAVR procedure was done on October 30, 2024. Four days later, Jerry took a four-mile walk around his Hannibal neighborhood. Ten days later, he was back on stage, wielding his bass guitar with his Southern Rail bandmates, playing a four-hour gig at a casino in Riverside, Iowa.

“It’s an amazing procedure,” Mary said of TAVR.

### The Kaszynskis’ hearts go out to their caregivers

Jerry and Mary are grateful for the care received from Drs. Yurevich, Cook and Arnold and their teams. They hold a special place in their hearts for TAVR program nurse practitioner Amy Bates.

“I could not have done this without Amy. She is extremely intelligent and answered every question I had,” Jerry said. “We absolutely love her.”

“She is awesome, just wonderful. Amy really puts you at ease,” Mary added.

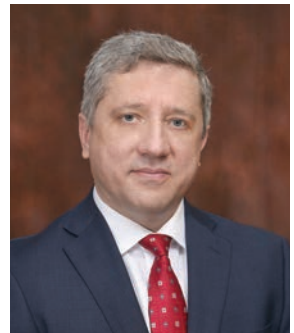
“Our goal with a valve replacement is not only to stop the disease from getting worse but to also restore good quality of life, and if there is anyone who knows how to enjoy life, it’s Jerry,” said Amy. “I am grateful he trusted us with his care and am overjoyed to watch him thrive after his TAVR.”

Jerry is back to everything he loves doing and adding things to his list of activities. What’s next? Skydiving. Really.

“It’s on my bucket list,” Jerry said with a smile. ■



John Arnold, MD



Oleg Yurevich, MD



Jeffrey Cook, MD



Amy Bates, APRN-AGACNP



For more information on the heart care available from Blessing Health, scan this code or go to [blessinghealth.org/heart](https://blessinghealth.org/heart)

*“I’m fine. I’ll be okay. I thought it was a fluke thing.”*

# “Independent” woman finds life-saving heart care at Blessing Health

Some people might call her stubborn. **Cyndee Lester** prefers the word “independent”.

Whatever word you choose after reading this story, Cyndee’s personality has served her well, leading to success personally and professionally.

But, her independence also almost cost her life.

“It was terrible,” Cyndee said. “They told me in the Blessing Emergency Center that I was basically on the one-yard line (near death). I did not realize how serious it was.”

## What happened?

Cyndee enjoyed good health for 58 years. The exercise fanatic and bank executive said, “I can’t sit still. I have to be doing something. If I am sitting at home, I feel guilty because I am not being productive.”

Her life changed one day when, on her way home from attending an out-of-town event, Cyndee was not feeling well and pulled over to the side of the highway.

“I blacked out for no reason,” she said.

Cyndee’s daughter, Hayley Leenerts, and Hayley’s fiancé at the time and now husband, Grant Leenerts, attended the event with her and helped get her home safely, encouraging Cyndee to seek medical help. Reluctantly, Cyndee went to the **Blessing Hospital Emergency Center** with her significant other, Randy Boyer, by her side for the answer to why she lost consciousness behind the wheel of her car.

From the ER, Cyndee was referred to the **Blessing Health Cardiology** team. It would take

a month for this “independent” woman to follow up with nationally board-certified and fellowship-trained cardiologist, **Dr. Farooq Junaid**.

“He wanted me to do all these tests and I thought he was crazy,” Cyndee said with a laugh. “I was thinking, ‘I’m fine. I exercise all the time. What can be wrong? It was just a fluke.’”

“She is an extremely healthy person who exercises religiously,” said Dr. Junaid. “So, it was concerning that her heart rate would be running low and she had passed out.”

If it was up to Cyndee, this story might have ended here. Enter **Ashley Sherwood, BSN, RN**, Dr. Junaid’s nurse.

“She was very persistent,” Cyndee said.

Six weeks after losing consciousness behind the wheel of her car along the side of the highway, and because of Ashley’s persistence, Cyndee finally agreed to the tests Dr. Junaid said she needed.

The results led to one more test—a heart catheterization.

Again, Cyndee objected, saying she was fine. “He’s like—‘No. You are not really fine,’” Cyndee said of Dr. Junaid’s response.

He was right. In the days before Cyndee’s scheduled heart catheterization, she lost consciousness five times, with her heart stopping for several seconds each time. During this episode, Cyndee lost consciousness behind her desk at work. With Randy’s help again, Cyndee returned to the Blessing Hospital Emergency Center with her heart rate in the lower 30s, her oxygen level in the 70s and her blood pressure through the roof.



Blessing Health heart patient Cyndee Lester is back to working out as many as five days a week for an hour or more each time thanks to her heart pacemaker.



A normal adult resting heart rate is 60 to 100 beats per minutes, and normal oxygen level is 95% to 100%. A slow heart rate (known as bradycardia) can be a serious problem because the heart can't pump enough oxygen-rich blood to the body.

Cyndee's independence gave way to another feeling on her return visit to the ER.

"I was scared to death. I had never been through anything that scary in my life."

Cardiologists and electrophysiologists **Drs. John Hammock** and **Oleg Yurevich** and cardiologist **Dr. Jeffrey Cook** joined Dr. Junaid in figuring out the best way to treat Cyndee.

"Cyndee's mother has a history of needing a pacemaker, and the concern was that Cyndee may need one too," Dr. Junaid stated.

She did. Cyndee received a pacemaker to raise and stabilize her low heart rate.

## Independent and healthy

The pacemaker did the trick. After seeing her medical team frequently over the past 15 months, Cyndee has had no episodes of lost consciousness and now only needs to see them annually as her heart is back on track.

She is grateful to all caregivers involved,

particularly Ashley Sherwood.

"If she would not have been persistent, it would not have been a good outcome at all," Cyndee exclaimed. "I am forever grateful to Ashley. I owe my life to her and the whole staff. The Blessing cardiology team is phenomenal, as is all Blessing staff. I was in the best hands possible."

"I feel incredibly privileged that Cyndee trusted us with her cardiac care," Ashley said. "When she experienced bradycardic episodes on multiple occasions, Dr. Junaid was prompt with review, and my job was to communicate the concerns to her with appropriate severity."

"I believe I was so adamant due to Cyndee's symptoms being severe. Fainting spells and low heart rate were providing strong evidence that an intervention was needed. She also had a family history of her mother needing bypass surgery and a pacemaker. Cyndee's symptoms were clearly affecting her everyday life," Ashley concluded.

Cyndee's advice to others is to be smart as well as independent when feeling any signs of ill health.

"Do not wait," Cyndee said. "I was being stubborn. You have one heart. Get it checked out." ■



"If [**Ashley Sherwood, BSN, RN**] would not have been persistent, it would not have been a good outcome at all. I am forever grateful to Ashley. I owe my life to her and the whole staff. The Blessing cardiology team is phenomenal, as is all Blessing staff. I was in the best hands possible."

— Cyndee Lester

*Cyndee Lester (second from left) with her Blessing Health heart team including cardiologist Dr. Farooq Junaid (far left), nurse Ashley Sherwood and medical office assistant Cooper Nisbet.*



For more information on the care available from the Blessing Heart & Vascular Center, scan this code or go to **[blessinghealth.org/heart](https://blessinghealth.org/heart)**

# Heart & Vascular Center recognized for excellence in cardiac electrophysiology

The **Blessing Heart & Vascular Center** has been awarded Electrophysiology (EP) accreditation by the American College of Cardiology (ACC) for demonstrated expertise in and commitment to treating patients with abnormal heart rhythms, known as arrhythmias.

As of March 2025, the Blessing EP lab was one of only 49 ACC accredited facilities in the country and the only one in Illinois. Missouri had no accredited EP labs at that time.

Approximately one in 18 people has an arrhythmia. Complications depend on the type of arrhythmia from which a patient suffers, but may include stroke due to blood clot formation, heart failure and sudden death. EP labs and the teams that staff them provide a variety of treatments for arrhythmias.

“Blessing’s EP lab team has demonstrated its commitment to

providing the communities it serves with excellent heart care,” said Deepak L. Bhatt, M.D., MPH, FACC, chair of the ACC Accreditation Management Board. “ACC Accreditation Services is proud to award Blessing Health with Electrophysiology Accreditation.”

Quincy native **John Hammock, M.D., FACC, FHRS**, performed the first EP procedure at Blessing in August 2013. Since then, thousands of patients have received lifesaving care without having to leave the area because of the availability of the Blessing EP Lab.



“This is a huge accomplishment for my team and the patients who need our care,” said Dr. Hammock. “The accreditation is the result of close collaboration with my outstanding, dedicated, and hardworking electrophysiology staff. I will be forever grateful to the EP lab manager, directors, Blessing administration and the patients who have trusted us with their care.”

**Dr. Oleg Yurevich** joined Dr. Hammock in 2022 as the demand for EP care grew.

“The addition of Dr. Yurevich was critical,” Dr. Hammock continued. “The program was

exploding in volume, and with his help I had time to focus on making the program a world-class operation. I will always be working to move the program forward.”

“I have worked in New York and Chicago,” added Dr. Yurevich. “The level of care we deliver in the Blessing EP lab is high.”

ACC accreditation is

based on rigorous on-site evaluation of an EP lab team’s ability to evaluate, diagnose and treat patients. Facilities that achieve accreditation meet or exceed an array of stringent criteria and have a team of caregivers that deliver improved patient outcomes, better patient education and more effective and efficient disease control.

The ACC is the global leader in transforming cardiovascular care and improving heart health. It credentials cardiovascular professionals in over 140 countries. ■



*Left to right: Danielle Doellman, RN; Olivia Rabe, RT(R), RCIS, RCSA; Ryan Schumacher, RN; Dr. John Hammock; Jody Figge, RN, RCES; Dr. Oleg Yurevich; Shannon Peters, RT(R), RCES, RCSA and Naomi Schenk, RN, RCES*



To learn more about arrhythmias and the nationally accredited Blessing EP lab, scan this code or go to **[blessinghealth.org/ep](https://blessinghealth.org/ep)**



# DAISY Awards

## Recognizing extraordinary care

Since the last issue of *Personal Blessing*, the following Blessing Health registered nurses joined the ranks of international DAISY award winners for delivery of extraordinary care, based on the nominations submitted by patients and their loved ones.



### Precious Thomas · 3 North

Nominated by the wife of a patient for whom she provided care

*"Precious made me feel less anxious by caring so much and giving me hugs when she knew I needed them."*

*She discharged us and walked me to the car, telling me to contact her if I had any questions or needed anything at all. Precious gave me so much confidence that I would do a great job taking care of his wound at home."*



### Allison Acklie · ICU

Nominated by the husband of a woman for whom she was providing care

*"When my wife woke up in the ICU, she was very fearful as she was still on the ventilator and could not move or speak."*

*Allison bent down and calmly spoke in my wife's ear and told her that she was at the hospital and she was safe. When my wife was moved into a regular room, she told me that Allison had made her feel safe. Allison speaking to her made her fear dissipate, and her reassuring presence kept her calm."*



### Lorenz Orig

3 North/3 Surgical

Nominated by the family member of a patient for whom she provided care

*My father has dementia and he was confused and frightened. Lorenz put forth extra effort to make him comfortable. She didn't just care for him as a patient, she cared about him as a person. His short-term memory is shot, but he wrote down Lorenz's name so he could remember it and tell me about her. He said, 'She loved me like family.'"*



### Nick Kelley

Progressive Care Unit

Nominated by the family member of a woman for whom he was providing care, for his "amazing bedside tact and patient communication"

*"Nick was a bright light in a scary situation and made my mom so comfortable. You can tell he loves his career and strives to provide the best patient experience. Nick was a welcoming sight during an unknown time for my mom while they were figuring out her issue, and we are forever grateful for his kindness and spectacular patient care."*



### Daffany Pugh

Behavioral Center

Nominated by a patient to whom she provided care

*"Daffany provided comfort during those times I struggled. She has a 'can do' attitude and is a great person to be around, with a great attitude and is friendly. Even when I was sad, Daffany was able to make me smile. Thank you for helping me while I was in crisis."*



### Abigail Tranor

3 South Surgical

Abigail, a new nurse with seven months on the job, was nominated by the husband of a patient to whom she provided care

*"Abigail was always cheerful and upbeat. She worked as if she realized what she was doing was her calling, to meet the needs of this patient right now, not simply fulfilling job requirements. I have rarely sensed such feeling watching a nurse. Abigail was truly a blessing to my wife and made her stay much better."*

# From top to bottom, when care was needed, this northeast Missouri man found help at Blessing Health

**Dr. Terry Newton did it all.** As a veterinarian in Bowling Green, Missouri, for 46 years, he treated large and small animals. From cattle to kittens, Dr. Newton was the caregiver to call.

"I loved veterinary medicine," the 77-year-old said. "I had really good people to help me, staff and University of Missouri veterinary students. They were all part of the family."

And when Dr. Newton needed care for himself – comprehensive care – he called on Blessing Health.

## "I was putting on my shirt"

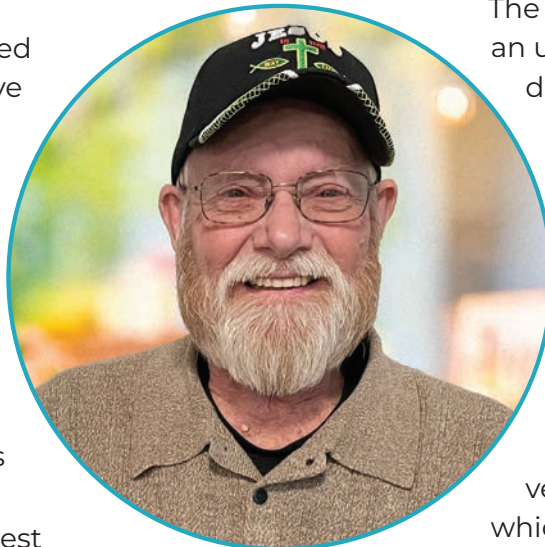
Dr. Newton was getting dressed one morning in Kansas City, Missouri, preparing to attend a veterinary conference, when his world changed.

"I ran my hand across my chest and I found a little spot—the size was similar to the tip of your little finger to the first joint. It did not feel right."

When he returned home, Dr. Newton saw his primary care provider, double board-certified internal medicine specialist, **Alex Coffey, MD**, at Blessing Health Hannibal, who agreed something was not right and referred Dr. Newton to Blessing Health Hannibal board-certified surgeon **Patricia Hirner, MD**.

Dr. Hirner ordered a mammogram.

"My wife Sharon got a pretty big kick out of me doing the mammogram because I usually teased her when she had to go through that procedure," Dr. Newton said. "For me, it was quite the procedure, because we men don't have much there for them to get in that machine. It took some contortions to get me in there."



The mammogram was followed by an ultrasound and a biopsy and a diagnosis that placed Dr. Newton in a select group of people—the 1% of men with breast cancer.

"It didn't worry me too much," he said. "God has always protected me. I just trusted my faith."

Genetic testing showed that Dr. Newton carried a mutated version of the BRCA2 gene, which can lead to uncontrolled cell growth and an increased risk of cancer development, particularly in breast tissue.

"Although male breast cancer is rare, males with a family history of BRCA mutation are at increased risk," said Dr. Hirner.

She performed a double mastectomy to remove Dr. Newton's cancer and to reduce the risk it would recur.

Examination of his lymph nodes showed the cancer had not spread, so chemotherapy and radiation oncology were not needed.



For more information on Blessing's breast cancer program and the care it provides, scan this code or go to **[blessinghealth.org/breastcenter](https://blessinghealth.org/breastcenter)**



"I was expecting it to be pretty bad. But it wasn't at all," Dr. Newton said. "Dr. Hirner is a fantastic person and a great surgeon."

Being part of a unique group has brought Dr. Newton special attention.

"You get some strange looks," he said of people when they learn he is a breast cancer survivor.

Dr. Newton is quick to share his advice to stay out of the group.

"If you suspect something, don't wait. Go get it checked. That's what I did. I was lucky to find that little spot. I didn't wait at all."

"And check yourself, especially if you have a family history with the BRCA2 gene."

"Most female breast cancer is detected by imaging, but most male breast cancer is found on self-exam, as was the case with Dr. Newton," added Dr. Hirner. "I would encourage breast self-exam in all women and men, particularly males with a family history of breast cancer. A person's chances for survival increase when cancer is detected early."

### Wait, there's more!

A year ago, Dr. Newton began experiencing severe urinary incontinence, going through lots of disposable undergarments and pads

each day. Again, he sought the care of Blessing Health and board-certified urologist **Bradley Holland, MD**.

When prescription medications did not work, Dr. Holland recommended a high-tech approach—a device called InterStim. InterStim therapy is an FDA-approved treatment for overactive bladder and urinary retention. It is an implantable device that sends mild

electrical pulses to the sacral nerves, located near the tailbone and that control the bladder.

If the sacral nerves don't communicate correctly with the brain, the bladder does not function properly. InterStim therapy stimulates these nerves so that they communicate with the brain for increased bladder control, allowing

people to return to their normal activities of daily living without the stress and fear associated with bladder-control issues.

"Dr. Newton is doing great with InterStim therapy and is very happy with the results," said Dr. Holland.

"This has been such a big help to me," Dr. Newton concluded. "It went from really bad to really good. If someone was putting up with what I was putting up with, I would sure investigate InterStim." ■



Alex Coffey, MD



Patricia Hirner, MD



Bradley Holland, MD

**"If you suspect something, don't wait. Go get it checked. That's what I did. I was lucky to find that little spot. I didn't wait at all."**

**DR. TERRY NEWTON**



For more information on Blessing's Urology program and the care it provides, scan this code or go to **blessinghealth.org/urology**

# Woman calls weight loss surgery the best decision she ever made

As the regional disaster manager for the American Red Cross based in Quincy, **Amanda Venvertloh** leads a team that uses the qualities of patience, persistence and passion to help people get back on their feet after a flood or tornado.

Those qualities also helped improve her own life.

After the birth of her second child, Amanda found it difficult to lose weight gained during pregnancy.

"I had put on about 80 pounds," she said. "Even though I was exercising and trying to eat right, I could not seem to take the weight off. It was impacting a lot, including my energy level and quality of sleep. I just did not feel good."

For the next 16 years, using commercial diets and prescription weight loss medications, Amanda patiently, persistently and passionately worked to lose the weight and keep it off. She had successes, but they were temporary.

Amanda's weight would eventually reach 238 pounds. Medical tests showed her blood sugar levels were climbing. With a family history of diabetes and congestive heart failure, Amanda knew she could not give up her fight.

"I was very concerned that If I didn't do something to get my weight and health under control, I was potentially not going to be around as my kids got older and they had kids. I wanted to get healthier."

## Now what?

Amanda's next step on her weight loss journey led her to surgeon **Fernando Bonanni, Jr., M.D., MBA, FACS, FASMBS**, board-certified bariatric surgeon and medical director of the nationally accredited **Blessing Bariatric Institute**.

"I was very impressed with his credentials and his manner," Amanda said of Dr. Bonanni. "He was kind, but he was direct. He gave me real answers and was very patient. I felt like he was the right fit for me. He was going to be the one to guide me through this process and continue on to a better life."

The Blessing Bariatric Institute offers three surgical procedures. With the support of Dr. Bonanni, Amanda chose the biliopancreatic diversion with duodenal switch procedure. In short, the procedure reduces the size of the stomach and shortens the small intestine. Results include the stomach feeling full faster, food moving through the small intestine more quickly so the body absorbs fewer calories, reduction of hunger hormone production and a rebalancing of gut hormones that reduce hunger.

"The duodenal switch is the most effective surgery for weight loss and addressing diabetes," Dr. Bonanni said. "To achieve those benefits, patients must commit to a regimented diet and supplement program and to lifelong follow-up."

"Success after bariatric surgery depends on a patient's commitment to understanding the disease of morbid obesity and taking an active role in achieving long-term health and happiness," Dr. Bonanni concluded.

Amanda understood the importance of her participation in this process.

"My biggest concern was getting my head into the mental space to adjust to a complete lifestyle change. It's not just the surgery. Dr. Bonanni says surgery is a tool, not a complete fix. The lifestyle change requires adjusting the kind of food and the portions you eat."







Amanda Venvertloh before and after her bariatric surgery



Fernando Bonanni, Jr.,  
M.D., MBA, FACS, FASMBS

“Over the course of several months, the team did everything they could to prepare me and make sure that I was ready to make the changes for the rest of my life to keep the weight off. They had my best interest at heart and made sure I was ready.”

Amanda also credits husband, Bruce, and her five children for the support they provided and continue to provide on her weight loss journey.

Amanda had surgery on June 14, 2024. As of late December 2024, she weighed 157 pounds, more than 80 pounds less than her highest weight. Amanda had about 20 pounds more to lose before she reached the stage of maintaining her weight loss.

“I’ve lost weight in a healthy way, which was very important to me. I didn’t just want to drop 40 pounds and then it stops. I lost weight at a steady rate that was very comfortable. I’ve been able to adapt to the dietary changes. I could not be happier. My lab tests are coming back great. I sleep better. I have a ton of energy. I feel really good.”

## Amanda’s advice and her future goals

“I want other people to take control of their health and do what is right for them without worrying they will be looked at by others who will say, ‘You should have exercised more.’ That is not always the case. What works for one person doesn’t work for another. You have to be in control of your health and take the steps that you need.”

“I am very open about and proud of my decision. It was the right decision for me and for my health. If weight loss surgery is the right tool for you, don’t be afraid to use it, if that is what you need to get healthy and be around for your loved ones.”

With a new level of energy accompanying her patience, persistence and passion, Amanda looks forward to an active future, “doing the things I need to do to continue to take advantage of this opportunity. It has given me a new lease on life,” she concluded. “My long-term goals are to be able to continue to do my job, support my family and be here for all the fun things that I know life has yet to offer me.” ■



In addition to weight loss surgery, the Blessing Bariatric Institute offers medically managed weight loss care and a heartburn and reflux center. For more information on these services, scan this code or go to [blessinghealth.org/bariatric](https://blessinghealth.org/bariatric)

# Positivity and high-tech care help woman battle history, habits and cancer



*"Every day to me is a blessing.  
If God gives me one more day,  
then I just live it up!"*

ROBIN BOERNSON

*Left to right: Robin's husband Robert, Robin, her grandson Jaxson, son Ross and grandson Bronson, daughter-in-law Britney and grandson Daniel.*

*Robin is holding a picture of her family that lives in Texas; grandson Dawson, son Bobby, daughter-in-law Christina, and grandson JT.*

It would be easy to say **Robin Boernson** should have known better. Her mother and five aunts were smokers, and each died of lung cancer, her mother at age 54.

But saying Robin should have known better ignores the fact that medical science knows so much more now about the deadly effects of tobacco than was known 50 years ago.

"I was a smoker from the time I was 13 years old until I had a heart attack in 2016," said the 61-year-old Quincy native. "I quit at that time and have not had a cigarette since."

Seven years after her last cigarette, Robin began experiencing lung infections and related breathing problems. Her primary care provider, **Sonia Behrens, APRN-FNP**, Blessing Employer Clinic, referred her to Blessing Health board-

certified and fellowship-trained pulmonologist **Umama Adil, MD.**

Robin was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) a lung disease that makes breathing difficult. A nodule in the lower lobe of her right lung was also found. The nodule was too small at the time of its discovery to biopsy for examination. Dr. Adil kept a close watch on Robin and performed a follow-up CT imaging scan a year later. At that time, the nodule had grown to one centimeter, the size of a pea, and was large enough to be biopsied.

## How is something inside the lung biopsied?

Patients undergoing a lung biopsy at Blessing Hospital for possible cancer have the procedure done with the latest technology, the Ion robot-



For more information on lung cancer diagnosis and treatment at Blessing Health, scan this code or go to [blessinghealth.org/treatments/lung-cancer](https://blessinghealth.org/treatments/lung-cancer)



assisted bronchoscopy system.

An Ion biopsy begins with creation of a 3D map of the patient's lungs through a CT scan. Using the 3D map, the Ion software generates the safest and most efficient route through the lung to the nodule or mass. No matter where the nodule or mass is, even deep within the lung as Robin's nodule was – the Ion makes reaching it easier than ever before by use of an ultra-thin catheter that can reach all 18 segments of the lung and move 180 degrees in all directions.

"In addition to providing greater reach into the lung, the Ion system provides greater stability during the biopsy process than any other alternative available today and allows us to know exactly where the catheter is in the patient's lungs at all times," said Dr. Adil.

The biopsy revealed Robin had early-stage lung cancer.

"Pretty scary," Robin said of her diagnosis. She is also a uterine cancer survivor. "Already having experience with what needs to be done when you have cancer, it was very emotional. But I have always been a positive person. And Dr. Adil sat down with me and flat out told me, 'This is so small, we are going to beat this.' She had no doubt in her mind."

The numbers support Dr. Adil's confidence. When lung cancer is diagnosed in the earliest stages of the disease, the average five-year survival rate is 92%. Lung cancer is the second leading cancer diagnosed and treated at Blessing Hospital and Blessing Health Hannibal.

"Dr. Adil is top-notch. She saved my life. I give her all the credit," Robin said.

In addition to Dr. Adil, several other members of the Blessing Hospital medical staff are skilled in the use of the Ion system, including board-

certified and fellowship-trained Blessing pulmonologist, **Nanjappa Somanna, MD.**

### Robin's treatment

Dr. Adil referred Robin to board-certified and fellowship-trained radiation oncologist **Mark Khil, MD.** Dr. Khil is medical director of Blessing's nationally accredited radiation oncology service. He and Robin decided on a course of five stereotactic radiosurgery treatments.

The treatment delivers high doses of radiation very precisely in short bursts over a period of a few days.

"Traditional surgery would be difficult if not impossible for Robin due to the damage done to her lungs by COPD and the small size of the nodule," said Dr. Khil. "Stereotactic radiosurgery is noninvasive and a very comparable and effective alternative to traditional surgery for early-stage lung cancer."

Blessing's radiation oncology department is the only one in the region accredited by the American College of Radiation Oncology (ACRO). The department undergoes a rigorous reaccreditation process every three years and has held accreditation continuously since 2001.

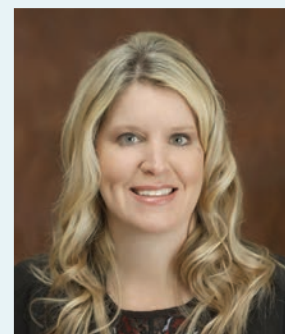
### Robin's future

Robin completed her stereotactic treatments and will undergo a CT imaging scan to determine the treatments' effectiveness.

"I feel good," she said. "I have put on weight, and I feel I have more energy now than I have in a long time."

Robin works full-time and enjoys spending time with family—her husband of 41 years, two sons, six grandchildren and her sister.

"Every day to me is a blessing. If God gives me one more day, then I just live it up!" ■



Sonia Behrens, APRN-FNP



Umama Adil, MD



Nanjappa Somanna, MD



Mark Khil, MD

## NEW PROVIDERS

### BLESSING BEHAVIORAL CENTER



#### **Daniel Boeder, MD**

A child and adolescent psychiatrist, Dr. Boeder is a graduate of Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, where he also completed residency. He then completed a fellowship in adolescent psychiatry at Memorial Medical Center, Springfield, Illinois.

"I had family members who needed mental health care and didn't know where to go or who to go to. I saw the need," Dr. Boeder said of his medical specialty. "Dealing with mental illness is a huge strain. I want to help as much as I can."



#### **Bejoy John, MD**

Board certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, Dr. John earned his medical degree in India and completed an internship and residency at MetroHealth Medical Center, Cleveland, Ohio and a fellowship at the University of Arizona College of Medicine.

"Psychiatric illnesses are biological disorders, just as other countless medical illnesses including diabetes and hypertension, and they need treatment," Dr. John said. "I am providing scientific, evidence-based treatment, educating my patients about their problems and learning from them in the process."

### EMERGENCY MEDICINE



#### **Roman Fridline, MD**

Board certified in emergency medicine, Dr. Fridline is a graduate of Central Michigan College of Medicine and completed a preliminary surgery residency at William Beaumont Health System in Royal Oaks, Michigan and an emergency medicine residency at Sparrow Hospital/ Michigan State University.

Dr. Fridline considered engineering as a career. But instead of applying scientific principles to design and build systems and structures to solve problems, he dedicated his life to medicine.

"Engineering doesn't allow enough human interaction for me. It is something I really like to have."

### ENDOCRINOLOGY

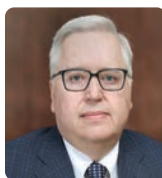


#### **Sandra Dempsey, MD**

Dr. Dempsey is certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine in internal medicine and endocrinology, diabetes and metabolism. She earned her medical degree from the Medical College of Georgia, Athens, Georgia and completed residency and a fellowship at the University of Illinois in Chicago.

"The well-coordinated complexity of the body's endocrine system with its potential hormonal disruptions and normal changes throughout the lifespan fascinates me," Dr. Dempsey said.

### FAMILY MEDICINE



#### **John Leiner, MD**

Dr. Leiner is an internal medicine specialist. He earned his medical degree from the Medical College of Virginia and completed residency at Indiana University Health Center. His special interests include preventive cardiovascular medicine and diabetes and metabolic health.

After spending the early part of his career treating patients and teaching medical students in Virginia and Indianapolis, Dr. Leiner has come home.

"I spent my summers on the family farm in Winchester, Illinois. My brother and I still operate the farm. We have a solar project going and are working on a greenhouse for vegetables. It is exciting to be back."

### HOSPITAL MEDICINE



#### **Venkata Achanta, MD**

Certified by the American Board of Internal Medicine, Dr. Achanta earned his medical degree from Rangaraya Medical College in India and completed residency at Brookdale Hospital and Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York.

With more than 17 years of experience as a hospitalist, Dr. Achanta follows the example of one of his professors whom he considers a role model.

"I interact with patients on a personal level as well as medically. That helps in the healing process. The way I interact with patients and explain things to them helps put them at ease."



To search our complete list of providers, scan this code or go to [blessinghealth.org/doctors](https://blessinghealth.org/doctors)



## MUSCULOSKELETAL MEDICINE

**Michael Kiely, DPM**

Dr. Kiely is a podiatrist. Certified by the American Board of Podiatric Medicine, he earned his medical degree from the Dr.

William M. Scholl College of Podiatric Medicine in Chicago and completed residency at the William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital in Wisconsin.

The son of a podiatrist, Dr. Kiely strives to help patients discover how the science of medicine can impact their lives.

“Anyone could read a book and know what a medical treatment should be and follow it,” he said. “But each patient needs to reach their own goals. It’s important to help people know what the textbook and current research says, and then help them make sense of that and how it impacts their lives.”

## NEUROSURGERY

**Brian Anderson, MD**

A graduate of Oregon Health and Science University, Dr. Anderson completed an internship, residency and two fellowships at Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey

Medical Center.

He specializes in neuromodulator implantation.

Neuromodulators are tiny computers that stimulate the central nervous system and assist in managing conditions ranging from pain to epilepsy and Parkinson’s disease.

“I have seen spinal cord injury patients move fingers that they hadn’t been able to move. It’s about as close to miraculous as anything in medicine is,” he said.

## ORTHOPEDICS AND SPORTS MEDICINE

**Benny Seto, MD**

Dr. Seto is a hand and upper extremity surgeon. Board certified by the American Board of Surgery, he earned his medical degree from the University of Rochester School of Medicine and

Dentistry and completed residency in general surgery and a hand surgery fellowship at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City.

“As a physician, I can help people alleviate their suffering due to injuries or other conditions,” he said. “In addition to managing my patients conservatively, as a surgeon it is gratifying to use my own hands to make a difference in their conditions, to help them get back the use of the hands in their activities of daily living.”

## SURGERY

**Lawrence Volz, MD**

An Air Force veteran, Dr. Volz received his medical degree from Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha, Nebraska and completed residency at Baystate Medical

Center in Springfield, Massachusetts.

He is skilled in robotic surgery. “I was a very early adopter of this amazing technology. The robot allows me to perform complicated intra-abdominal surgery through small incisions, allowing for rapid discharge from the hospital with minimal pain, quick recovery and return to normal activity.”

Dr. Volz was an active-duty surgeon during his Air Force service and retired with the rank of major.

“Being an Air Force veteran has allowed me to understand and connect with fellow veterans. Many veterans find peace in knowing I served as well,” Dr. Volz concluded.



## Sciton Laser Services

Sciton laser services use advanced technology to enhance skin health through various treatments. Services benefit anyone looking to improve their skin’s appearance, from mild imperfections to significant aging concerns or surgical scarring.

**Call 217.214.6256 for a consultation**



## MicroLaserPeel

*Gently removes damaged skin layers, addressing fine lines and sun damage with minimal downtime. The NanoLaserPeel offers a quick refresh for those seeking subtle improvements, making it ideal for first-time users.*

## Profractional

*Treatments target deeper skin layers to stimulate collagen production, suitable for individuals with deeper wrinkles and scars. Deep Ablation provides significant rejuvenation for severe sun damage and acne scars by removing damaged layers.*

## BBL Services

*Use light energy to treat pigmentation and redness, tailored to individual skin concerns for a clearer complexion. BBL can be used to treat active acne and for laser hair removal.*

Programs, services and new technology featured in this issue of *Personal Blessing* are made possible in part by donations to Blessing Hospital and the Blessing Foundation. The Giving Society is an honor roll of those showing love through charitable giving of \$100 and above. Gifts below were received for the following services: Behavioral Health Services, Hospice Big Hearts TAPP, Blessed Beginnings, Blessing Hospice, Blessing Hospital, Blessing Lauretta M. Eno Early Learning Center, Blessing Nurses Alumni Association Scholarship, Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing & Health Sciences General Endowment, Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing & Health Sciences Other Grant Funds, Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing & Health Sciences Simulation Center, Blessing-Rieman College of Nursing & Health Sciences Unrestricted, Breast Services, Cancer Center & Radiation Services, Critical Care Fund PCU-IMC/ICU, Diabetes Patient Care Fund, Employee Crisis/Caring Club Fund, EMS Office, Hannibal Clinic Health Services, Health Sciences Programs Crisis and Scholarship Fund, Heart & Vascular Center, Home Care, Karter K Fund, Nurse Education Fund, Palliative Care Fund, Radiology Simulation Lab Upgrade, Skilled Nursing Unit, Teresa Adams House, Teresa Adams House Endowed/Operations Fund, Blessing Foundation Unrestricted Fund, Wound Healing Hyperbaric Center.

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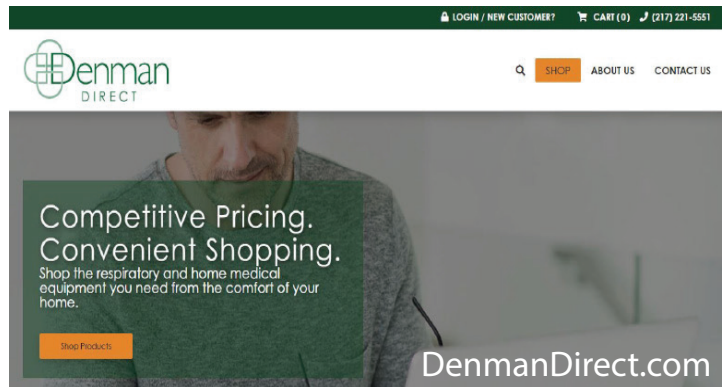
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